

Drought

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Summary: The after-effects of the battle with Death are still lingering on the Pride Lands. Zazu has lost his job, and the pride has lost their main source of water. Can anyone help?

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: The Aftermath

AN: I'm back, baby – with thirteen more stories that are sure to entertain and amaze you! It's time for things to become quite bleak and depressing. For the moment, anyway. I mean, it's not exactly as if the Pride Lands were in the best of states after Death attacked the place, is it?

Drought

Chapter One: The Aftermath

"Fired? You can't fire me! I quit!"

It wasn't normal that an arguing hornbill became a wakeup call for Nala. Usually, she just woke up on her own accord. Either that or Simba woke her up, having found the latest adventure to embark on. Or Haiba trying to kiss her while she was sleeping. That had happened a few times, too.

Actually, come to think of it, it was pretty rare that Nala ever woke up on her own accord. Something always managed to get in the way. What she'd give for a couple of nights' worth of good sleep...

But this time, it was pretty strange. It wasn't just the loud volume of Zazu's angry arguing. There was something else waking her from her sleep.

It was rare that she was ever woken up by a hug. Normally, a nice, warm, cuddly hug was what put her to sleep in the first place. But this time, the hug was... different. Like someone was shielding her. Protecting her.

Which raised the question: what did she need protecting from?

Nala's eyes flickered open, as she slowly lifted her head, to find the source of the protective hug.

It was Simba. Although, if something were to happen to her, he wouldn't have been able to do anything about it. He was fast asleep. But he still remained hunched over her body, as if he was trying to save her from an unseen enemy.

"Simba?"

Simba's eyes snapped open, startling Nala. "What is it, Nala?" he asked, his eyes darting left and right. Like something terrible was about to happen, right there in the middle of the den. "And..." He narrowed his eyes. "Who's shouting?"

"... Well, that's fine by me!" Zazu's shouting continued from outside the den. "You've lost yourself the best royal advisor you're ever going to get! Good day!"

Simba watched as Zazu flew away. He looked back at Nala. "What's going on?" he asked her. "Why is Zazu... leaving?"

"I'm not sure," Nala replied, rubbing one of her eyes with a paw. "It's what woke me up. Well, that and your strange hug. It seemed like you were trying to protect me – or something like that."

"I... I was," he confessed, looking down at the ground, feeling a little sheepish about the reason why. "I don't know, I just... thought that... if I let you go, then... something would happen to you."

Nala smiled. "Oh, Simba..." She put a paw to his cheek, stroking it softly. "Nothing like that is ever going to happen again."

She was of course referring to the events of the previous day – or night, depending on how one thinks about it. A terrifying, horrific entity known only as Death had arrived in the Pride Lands, planning on claiming thirteen souls for his own.

He almost succeeded – killing Nala and just about everyone else in the pride – but was foiled at the very last second by Simba, who would have become Death's thirteenth victim if it wasn't for a very odd – yet magical – turnaround. Simba still couldn't find the words to explain it.

"I hope not," Simba replied, still feeling a lump in his throat. He didn't like to think about it – much like many of the other creatures and horrible things he'd faced before. But Death was by far the worst. He'd killed Nala. *Murdered* her. And it was only by a stroke of luck that she had been revived.

He didn't want that to happen again. He wouldn't allow it. *Couldn't* let it happen.

Because next time, he knew there was no way she would come back.

"Come on," Nala said, nudging Simba on the side as she got to her paws. "We'd better go see what's up."

Simba nodded in response, following Nala out of the den. He found his parents – Mufasa and Sarabi – speaking just outside.

"... Mufasa, are you sure you weren't too hard on him?" Sarabi asked, looking toward the sky. "Maybe you could have been a little more—"

"I did what I had to do," Mufasa interrupted. "Zazu has become far too reckless. After the events of yesterday – or night, depending on how one thinks about it – I made my decision. He is no longer welcome to his position as a royal advisor – until he changes his ways."

"Mufasa, you wouldn't... exile him, would you?" Sarabi had a worrying look in her eyes.

"Of course not," was the King's reply. "That would be too extreme. But he's going to have to settle in somewhere else for the foreseeable future."

"You *fired* Zazu?"

Mufasa and Sarabi both looked down at their shocked son. "Simba?" said Mufasa, a little alarmed. "I – I didn't hear—"

"Didn't hear you firing Zazu," Simba interrupted. "Dad, why'd you do that? Zazu hasn't done anything wrong."

"He has insulted us, Simba," Mufasa explained. "And he's shown himself to be careless and irresponsible of his duties as a royal advisor. So, I'm afraid we had to depose him."

Simba stared at his parents. "What is wrong with you?" he sighed, before walking away.

Sometimes he just couldn't understand his parents. They didn't seem to trust anyone. First it was just a minor annoyance. Then it started to become quite bothersome. But now it was just bordering on the level of utter cruelty. Just what was wrong with them? It's like they weren't themselves anymore.

"Hey, wait up!" Nala called, following Simba down Pride Rock. "So much for protection," she remarked with a smile. "Well, so far we've established that Zazu is fired, your parents are totally insane, and Haiba has vanished off the face of the—"

"Not a chance," Haiba said with a smile, appearing from underneath Pride Rock. "You know, it's funny how many dead snakes you find under a famous landmark. I'll take care of them later – before your parents freak out or something. So, I hear Zazu's been fired. Seen him sulking miserably by the water hole. He looks ready to burst into tears."

"We noticed," Simba said. "The poor guy. All he's been through and he gets fired for it. My parents can be idiots sometimes. Actually, no, I'm lying. They're idiots *all* the time. I think I might need to bash them on the head with a stick or something. But even that probably wouldn't help."

"Then we'd better go and see him," Nala suggested, walking in the direction of the water hole. "You know how much that job means to him. For all we know, he might want to drown himself in the water."

Simba followed Nala, with Haiba giving her a funny look. "*What* water?" he said.

Simba and Nala turned around, confused. "What do you mean?" Nala asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

"You heard me," was his reply. "There's no water in the water hole – which kind of defeats the purpose of its name, but you get what I mean."

"How can there be no water?" Simba asked, taking a step towards Haiba. "You can't just take it out."

"Well, you can tell that to the guy who did it," said Haiba. "All I know is that there's no water left. It's gone. Empty. Dried up. Just looks like a very big hole now."

Nala frowned. "Let's go and see," she said, before carrying on walking – at a slightly quicker pace this time. "It can't be *that* bad."

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Drained and Dried

Chapter Two: Drained and Dried

"Okay." Nala smiled. "So maybe it *is* that bad."

The water hole had been completely drained. It couldn't even be technically called the 'water hole' now. It was just a hole. A very big hole, but still a hole, nonetheless. There was not a single drop of water to be found anywhere. It had all completely dried up. It all looked so empty and deserted. Nala found herself feeling thirsty just by looking at it.

"How did this happen?" Simba couldn't believe what he was seeing, and, to be honest, it made him feel a little worried.

The water hole was the main source of water for the Pride Lands. So, if it was completely empty, then where was everyone going to get their water from? There wasn't much else around for miles. Rain wasn't common, so it wouldn't be long before everyone died of dehydration.

"I would assume it was caused by the events of the previous day – or night, depending on how one thinks about it," Haiba mused. "Don't you remember? Death turned the water into blood."

Simba shuddered. "Don't remind me," he said. "So what you're saying is that it must have been reversed or something, right?"

Haiba nodded. "Yep. I guess that instead of turning the blood back into water, it just got emptied out. Well, either that or someone else drained it. I don't know why anyone would do that, though."

Nala chuckled. "Maybe they're just really thirsty?" she jokingly suggested with a shrug. "Or they want their own pool to swim in."

"This is just weird," Simba said, jumping from the edge of the large hole, landing on the hard dirt below.

"Ow!" he cried, surprised at how solid and firm the dirt was. If someone jumped into this hole, then they wouldn't have known there was once water flowing through it. "This dirt is *really* hard!"

"Let me see," Nala said, before jumping into the hole herself. "Yow!" she yelled, as pain shot up through her paws. "That's pretty hard!"

"This is why we have common sense," Haiba said, before gently lowering himself from the edge and into the hole. "I mean, what did you expect from a completely dried up hole? Hey, here's an idea: why don't we start spitting and see if we can fill it back up again? I'm sure that's a real smart thing to do!"

"I'm distracted today," Simba muttered, looking around the derelict hole. "And tired. Just stop yelling at me and let me think." He wandered over to the edge, lowering himself so he could take a look at the dirt wall. "Hey... look at this."

"What is it?" Nala asked, joining Simba by his side.

"Look." Simba pointed to a little tunnel that had been built into the wall of the hole. Peering inside, Simba could only see darkness. Maybe it went on for miles and miles and miles, to a place far, far away... "That must be where the water goes."

"Where do you think it leads to?" Nala wondered, looking at Simba.

Simba shrugged. "I don't know. Could be so far away that just *thinking* about it makes your head hurt. Or it could just be on the other side of the kingdom. Either way, I know the one person that would be able to tell us about every single thing in the Pride Lands – including water tunnels."

"Who?" Haiba asked.

"Zazu, obviously."

"Fired!" Zazu exclaimed, tears dripping down his face. "Unemployed! Terminated! Let go! Removed!" He hugged the tree branch he was sat on. "Oh, this is an absolute travesty! I can't stand it! I should throw myself into the water hole! That is, if there were any water left in it. Another problem for the so-called 'high and mighty' King to take care of – *without* my help."

Aside from the night of his father's murder, Zazu had never felt so upset before. He'd worked as the King's royal advisor

ever since he had claimed the throne from his father, Ahadi; before Zazu had even began to grow up. That position was all that had mattered to him. There was no one else in his life. No one to like. No one to love. No one at all.

He was all alone in the world. All that had significance was his job – and he didn't even have *that* anymore.

Now what was he going to do? He had no purpose in life. He might as well die. He wanted to die there and then. Or just shrivel up and disappear for ever. Either way, he didn't mind.

"Zazu!"

Zazu let out a cry of surprise, falling from the branch he was clinging on to and hitting the ground below with a loud *thump!* "What in the name of—"

Zazu looked upwards, and found Simba, Nala and Haiba standing over him. "Oh. Young master, Simba, it's you." Picking himself to his feet, Zazu brushed himself down with his wings. "What do you want?"

"Zazu, we need your help," Simba explained. "You see, the water hole's been completely drained and—"

"I did notice, for your information," Zazu told the cub. "It would be much harder to miss it. Anyway, what seems to be the problem?"

"As I was saying," Simba continued, "the water hole is completely empty, but we found a tunnel in the wall. You know everything about the Pride Lands, so where does it lead to?"

Zazu easily knew the answer to Simba's question. Having studied every inch of the Pride Lands four thousand and seventy-three times, he knew exactly where the tunnel went. "The tunnel connects water from the Pride Lands water hole to the central river source right in the middle of the flatlands, to the left."

"In the middle, to the left?" Haiba said with a raised eyebrow. "That doesn't even make any sense."

"It does when you've studied these lands for years," was Zazu's response. "You know you can trust an... ex-royal advisor like me. I hope you're not planning on travelling all the way out there, though."

"Yes, we are," Simba confirmed. "Come on, guys. Thanks for your help, Zazu."

With that, the three cubs were gone. "No problem at all, master Simba," Zazu called after them, before looking down at the ground, sighing sadly. "That's... what I'm here for."

AN: Oh, poor Zazu. He's never ever going to get a good break. Things just keep getting worse and worse for him. Oh, well. At least the Pride Landers will die of dehydration soon – unless our three favourite cubs can track down where all the water has suddenly disappeared to.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: In the Middle, to the Left

AN: Sorry I'm a little bit late. Mad day you wouldn't believe – but I do have two more chapters for you, and one of the weirdest villains ever. Just what you need to get your day off to a good start, eh?

KaylaDestroyer: I'm always happy to start a new series. And yes, things are looking rather bleak for Zazu right about now. But I'm sure things will get better. You could almost say *romantically* better...

LionKingFactsGuy2: Your observation is perfect. Why are they acting like this? It's almost like I'm planning ahead – again. Hah-hah-hah!

Chapter Three: In the Middle, to the Left

"Am I the only one who feels drier than the sun today?" Haiba asked, feeling like he was melting out in the sweltering heat. Normally it was hot in the Pride Lands – and that was just about tolerable – but this was just ridiculous. He didn't think it had ever been hotter since he'd started living there.

Simba nodded in agreement, rubbing his neck with a paw. "Me, too," he said, frowning at how hot it was. "And do you know what makes it even worse?"

"No. What?" Haiba asked.

"We're under a tree."

Simba, Nala and Haiba were stood under a particularly large tree, standing in the shade of its enormous shadow. The three cubs were staring out at a long, wide stretch of land, which seemed to go on for ever.

This was the flatlands, and it was the number one place in the world to go if you wished to starve to death. It wasn't uncommon for grown lions to collapse out in the hot sun and get themselves picked clean by buzzards. It was like some kind of dead zone – but if you wanted to get to the jungle, then you had to go through the flatlands first. Simba, Nala and Haiba had done this many times before, but because of the intense heat, it worried them about getting across safely.

Nala looked up at the tree, a worried expression on her face. "We are?" she said, surprised. "Oh, man... It's the hottest day of the year. Do you think it's so hot that the water in the water hole all just dried up?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," Haiba replied, sighing. His whole body felt like it was on fire. He wondered that if he stepped out onto the flatlands, then would he instantly ignite, burning to death in just a matter of seconds. It didn't sound impossible... "But I suppose we might as well look at Simba's idea."

"I didn't know he even *had* an idea," said Nala, turning to Simba. "Come on, Simba. Spit it out."

"Spit what out?" Simba said, confused. "Oh, you mean my idea. Uh, well, I think that someone's taken the water."

"Water's everywhere," Nala said. "Well... sort of, but you get what I mean. You don't exactly need to *steal* it."

"Unless you don't have water," Simba said, not really getting what Nala meant. "I mean, think about it. If you didn't have water, then you'd be *desperate* for it, wouldn't you? It's something you *need*. *Everyone* needs it."

"Or you die a slow and painful death," Haiba added. "The same thing that'll happen to us if we try to get across the flatlands."

"It's not too bad," Simba said. "Uh... watch."

Cautiously, Simba stepped out from the shade of the tree, exposing himself to the searing heat, and placed his paws on the ground of the flatlands. "See? Nothing to worry about—"

Simba let out a loud scream of pain!

Nala and Haiba gasped. "Simba!" Nala cried. "What's—"

Then Simba started laughing. "Just kidding," he told the two. "It's fine. Really. Nothing to be scared of. It just feels a little... hot, that's all. It's not like it's gonna make you *melt* or anything."

"Okay." Haiba joined Simba by his side. "Then we'd better get walking. Too long and we'll end up buzzard food. I'd rather

not experience the most embarrassing death you can possibly have, if it's all the same with you."

"It'll be fine."

"Water!" Haiba cried, crawling across the dusty ground, which seemed to never end. "Need... water! Can't... go... on!"

"Uh, Haiba," said Nala.

Haiba looked behind, to see Nala standing underneath the tree. "You've only been crawling for ten seconds," she pointed out. "I haven't even started *walking* yet."

"Oh." Haiba got to his paws, chuckling. "Oops."

"What's wrong with you today?" Simba asked. "A little bit of sun and all of a sudden you're acting like it's the worst thing in the world. You should be happy – we could be stuck in the den all day, feeling so bored that the only thing we can do is eat each other."

Nala and Haiba stared at Simba with wide eyes. "Pretty freaky imagination you've got there, huh, Simba?" said Haiba, scratching his head.

"A pretty *exaggerating* imagination, if you ask me," Nala remarked.

"You coming or not?" Simba asked, looking impatient. He was just itching to rush into his next adventure. There had to be something – or someone – behind this mysterious water shortage, and he planned to find out what.

"Yeah, we're coming," Haiba muttered, as he and Nala followed Simba across the flatlands. "I still think that we'll probably be puddles of goo by the time we get there, though!"

"Now who's exaggerating?" Simba retorted with a smile. "Come on. We'll find that dirty, good-for-nothing meanie who took all the water."

"And what happens when we *do* find him?" Nala asked. "We didn't exactly plan this out – much like everything else we've ever done in our lives."

"I'll know what to do when we get there," Simba assured her. "Now, what was it that Zazu said?"

"In the middle, to the left," Haiba said. "That doesn't make any sense, though. If something's in the middle, then it's in the middle. It can't be to the left or right of the middle. It's giving me a headache – as if this sun wasn't giving me enough of one already."

"It's kind of weird..." Nala looked deep in thought. "Ever since the water disappeared, it seems to be getting warmer. Have you noticed that?"

"Yeah," Simba agreed. "I've noticed. It just keeps getting hotter and hotter. Great, so now we've gotta fight 'Hot Guy' or something. I thought Shocker was enough of a problem to deal with."

"So who do you think has the power to make things hotter?" Haiba wondered. "And why would they want to drain the water hole? It's really confusing, and it just... it just doesn't add up."

"I know," Simba said. "Which means we've gotta find the person behind this before it gets *too* hot. Otherwise we'll end up ___"

Thwack!

And before Simba even knew it, he was unconscious.

***Chapter 4*: Chapter 4: A Muddled Up Mind**

Chapter Four: A Muddled Up Mind

Simba's eyes flickered open, his vision blurry and unfocused. Everything seemed so hazy. His head was spinning. He just couldn't concentrate. Couldn't focus on anything... The whole world seemed to be passing him by in slow motion. His head was thumping. Throbbing with pain. He couldn't work anything out...

He closed his eyes, but that didn't seem to help. His head was still pounding, but at least the dizziness seemed to have subsided – for the moment, anyway.

But the mystery of what had happened to him – and, Simba feared, his friends – still remained. That seemed to tease his brain the most of all. He didn't know what had happened. It had all gone by so quickly. One second he was talking to Nala and Haiba, but the next he felt the most horrible pain in the back of his head.

That was when everything went black. And right now, it still felt that way. Simba just lay there, his eyes closed.

Doing nothing.

Some feeling began to creep back into his body, and he found himself feeling rather cold. Kind of... chilling, actually. He hadn't felt so cold since his encounter with the King of Dreams...

Opening his mouth, Simba tried to take a deep breath. He thought that would calm him down a bit. Ease his nerves. Allow him to focus more.

But then no breath came. No air. None at all, in fact.

Immediately alarmed and confused, Simba's eyes snapped open. He looked around this newfound world of blurriness, and came to a startling realisation.

He was underwater.

His auburn eyes widening, Simba kicked frantically with his legs, sending them flailing about all over the place. His mind couldn't fully comprehend what was going on. He was underwater? How did that happen? Why did it happen? Who had caused it?

So many questions, all of them flying through his mind at an incredible pace, preventing him from answering them. His whole world – while seeming rather empty at the moment – was spinning around and around. Nothing seemed real. It was as if he were dreaming.

Emerging from the water, Simba gasped for air, savouring every intake of it. He'd never wanted air so badly in his life. He screamed. "What was...? How did...?" He still couldn't think properly. Lying unconscious under the water for a long period of time had obviously messed with his mind. He felt very lucky to be alive.

This left him seriously concerned about Nala and Haiba. Where were they? Had they been placed underwater, too? Were they *drowning* while he sat there, thinking so fast that it made his headache worsen?

Simba decided to calm down, take things one step at a time, and survey his surroundings.

Circling around, he couldn't see much. He seemed to be stuck in some kind of extremely large river, but to Simba it seemed more like an ocean. An endless ocean, which would never ever stop. Maybe he was in an entire *world* that was filled with water...

He closed his eyes, sighing. He was going crazy. Seriously. His thoughts had become so muddled up that he was starting to go insane. Think the most outlandish thoughts possible. He couldn't tell left from right.

"I'm going to die," he realised aloud, looking around. There was nothing to assist him. No one to help him. Nothing was happening. He was literally stuck in a big river of... nothing. "Unless someone shows up and—"

"Ahem."

Thwack!

And then Simba was unconscious again.

With an even worse headache than before.

"Wake up, little cub..." a voice in Simba's ear commanded. "Wake up..."

Simba slowly opened his eyes, and concluded that he was no longer underwater. That was most likely a bonus. At least he wasn't in any immediate danger anymore. But there was still the problem of where he had ended up this time.

His vision returned to normal, and he found himself staring up at the evil mastermind who had caused all of this.

It was a lioness. A very attractive lioness, Simba had to admit. She had dark, tanned fur and bright, aquatic blue eyes. Simba mentally smacked himself for admiring just how beautiful she was – especially because she was an evil villain.

Well, that's what he *assumed*.

"I apologise for the haziness," the lioness said, in an alluring tone. "Plunging you headfirst into water can cloud your mind rather easily. But that doesn't matter. You're safe..." The lioness leaned in close, so Simba was staring right into her eyes. "For now."

"Who..." Simba couldn't believe how beautiful she was. "Who are you?"

The lioness laughed. "My name is Maji, you silly little thing." She placed a paw on Simba's chest, softly stroking it up and down. "Such a fine body – for a cub," she commented, sounding genuinely impressed. "This pleases me."

"It *does*?" Simba exclaimed, surprised. His breathing became ragged. This... Maji person, she was so beautiful. Every part of her was unbelievably attractive. She was drawing him in – but strangely, he didn't care.

"You're very interesting," Maji commented, eyeing Simba up and down. "Very interesting indeed. As soon as I spotted you, I knew I just had to have you – if you know what I mean."

Simba gulped. "What... what have you done with my friends?" he asked, eyes widening. He couldn't avert his gaze from her blue eyes. She was so alluring...

"Oh... them." Maji rolled her eyes. "Suspended in the water. Don't worry, they'll be just fine. But it's you I want first, Simba. It's you I *need* first. You have to understand that. You're just so..."

And then Maji kissed him.

Simba kissed her back, feeling nothing more than the deepest of affection for her. He didn't just like her. He *loved* her. From head to toe. Every inch of her was amazing. He loved her more than anything else in the whole world. Even more than Nala...

Nala?

Simba pushed himself away from Maji, suddenly coming to his senses. What had he been thinking? How could he like this creepy lioness more than Nala? How could he *love* this lioness? The thought alone made him feel sick to his stomach.

"Wait, I... I can't do this," Simba told her. "It's wrong."

"That was just a warm-up," Maji said, staring at Simba with a hungry glint in her eyes. She looked as if she were ready to feast on a tasty meal. "To see what the wetness was like."

"Huh?" Simba didn't understand.

"You see, Simba, you have something that I crave," Maji explained. Simba tried to get up, but she held him back down. "And I'm going to get it from you – whatever it takes."

Maji kissed Simba again.

And this time, there were no complaints from him.

AN: Oh, wow. That is weird. I love Maji, though. She's one of the most outlandish villains yet. Nowhere near as weird as Death, but kissing cubs? Um... Okay. That's odd. But why would she be doing this? What does she crave? Only time will tell.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: Sun, Sea and Misery

AN: Yay! I'm not slightly late this time! Good for me, and also good for you. Well, here's more of Simba and the ever-alluring villain, Maji. I love her already. Yet another great villain to add to the roster.

Kblade: Good question. What *did* happen to Shocker? Well, we haven't seen him since his introduction story, so he must be planning something very evil right about now. Probably revenge. I'm sure you'll see by the time the fifth story swings around...

can'tthinkofasuitableusername: I write the best bad guys? Awesome! I do pride myself on the ability to create antagonist after antagonist. But in my opinion, nothing's ever gonna beat Death. Shocker and Maji come close, though.

Chapter Five: Sun, Sea and Misery

The kissing was unlike anything Simba had ever experienced before. To say that it was incredible was an understatement. It was so much more than that. It was passionate, heartfelt, and very, very real. Word could not describe how exhilarated he felt during the process. It was that amazing.

Maji finally released Simba from the kiss, leaving him gasping and panting for breath. "That was... amazing," he finally said, having forgotten about just how wrong this actually was. If Nala found out about this, then their relationship was over.

But right now, Simba didn't even care about Nala. In fact, he didn't even care about anyone at all. It was all irrelevant. All that mattered now was spending more romantic time with Maji. She was his new love in life.

"I take it that you enjoyed the feeling of pressing your skin against mine," Maji said, smiling down at the lovesick cub. "I believe your kind call it a 'kiss'. I can't say I don't find entertainment in it myself."

"Your... kind?" Simba said, his confused mind becoming even more muddled up. The world and everything around him had no meaning anymore. All he cared about was this moment right now. Nothing else had any significance. None of it. Not anymore.

"Oh, Simba," said Maji, using her ever-alluring tone of voice. She giggled, using one of her claws to stroke Simba underneath his chin. He purred in response. "I'm not your conventional lioness. I'm far more than that. I'm very, very special. In fact, this isn't even my true form. It's far more... *aquatic*."

Simba continued to purr, savouring every word that came out of her mouth. His heart was thumping so fast that it felt like it was going to explode. She was perfect – in every single way. He just couldn't contain his joy. "Yeah..."

"You see, Simba, I need you for a very special purpose. I've done it many times before, but it's not something that goes away very easily. In fact, it *never* goes away. Never ever, ever. Do you understand?"

Simba giggled in response, a dopey smile on his face. He didn't even know what was going on anymore. All he cared about was Maji...

"And I'm going to take it from you, Simba," she told him. "Oh, I'm going to take all of it. You don't even know what I'm saying anymore, do you?"

Simba did nothing. He just carried on smiling, completely lost in her entrancing beauty.

Maji laughed. "That happens a lot. My hypnotic beauty does wonders for the unwary individual who happens to cross my path. They're so unfortunate – but they feel so very lucky. All because of me, and the powers that I possess. You're very, very unfortunate, Simba. But you don't even know it."

Maji leaned forwards, and kissed Simba again. She closed her eyes, resisting the urge to let out a moan of pleasure. "Simba..." She released him from the kiss. "I just can't contain myself. It's always the young ones. The older ones don't have enough juice in them. But you do. I can see it. Flowing through your body." Her eyes glinted with hunger. "*I love it*."

She eyed Simba up and down, a hungry grin forming on her face. "Maybe just a few more kisses first, though," she said. "Because you are so *very* handsome."

And then they began to kiss again.

Nala coughed and spluttered as she emerged from the water, gripping the sand with her claws. Her head was throbbing with pain. It was the worst headache she'd ever had before. And the merciless heat of the sun wasn't making things better, either. She felt so unpleasant. She just wanted to close her eyes and drift off to sleep for ever and ever. Nothing would please her more than to do just that.

But she had a job to do. "Haiba, where the heck are we?"

Haiba was hunched over the sand, coughing up more and more water. "I – I don't know," he replied through a few coughs. He then reached into his mouth, and pulled out a long strand of seaweed. "Oh, man..." Disgusted, Haiba threw the seaweed aside, a sickened frown on his face. "That's gross on a level even I find disgusting."

"Well, think!" Nala commanded, looking around the area. In front of her, all she could see was the sand. A vast field of sand, which seemed to go on for ever. Maybe they had ended up in some kind of desert. "We have to be *somewhere*..."

Turning around, Nala saw the sea. That too seemed to go on for miles. Water or sand. She didn't know which one was more dangerous. They could drown in the water, but they could starve in the sand. They were stuck in a perpetual limbo of absolute misery.

"I believe they call it the beach," Haiba said, finally deciding to survey his surroundings. "Sand, sea, and se—" He stopped himself. "Well, that would be rude of me to say – but it happens in these places. Anyway..."

Taking a few steps forward, Haiba narrowed his eyes, straining to see if there was anything that lay beyond the endless desert. But there was nothing in sight. Just the sand. The neverending sand. "I believe the phrase rhymes with 'cluck'," he said in a half-joke.

"Duck?" Nala suggested.

Haiba smiled, shaking his head. "Never mind. Look, we've gotta figure things out. Where's Simba, for a start?"

Nala shrugged. "I don't know. One minute we were..." She struggled to remember. "Talking. We were... we were talking. Then everything just went black. And then I opened my eyes, and all I saw was you, waking me up. We were underwater. Then we swam right here – into this big desert."

"Same here," Haiba agreed. "That's all I remember, too. I woke up underwater, then I saw you. I knew I couldn't just leave you to drown, so I woke you up before we swam here." He hit the ground. "Darn. What are we going to do when there's nothing to help us?"

"And you're sure Simba wasn't underneath the water with us?" Nala asked.

Haiba shook his head. "Definitely. I would have noticed. I may find you attractive, Nala, but I wouldn't leave Simba in the water to drown. Besides, I wouldn't mind kissing either one of you, to be honest."

"This is hopeless," Nala said, sinking to the ground, defeated. "We're going to starve out here."

"Oh, don't be like that," Haiba said. "We've got water to drink. Sure, it's salty, but normal water gets kinda tasteless after a while. And..." He scooped up a bit of sand with his paw, shoving it into his mouth and chewing on it thoughtfully.

"Well... the sand is okay, I guess." He swallowed it in one big gulp. "Kind of gritty."

Nala frowned. "I'm dead."

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: Under the Sand

Chapter Six: Under the Sand

"I love you, Maji," Simba told his beautiful new girlfriend, staring into her deep-sea eyes. "More than anything else in the whole world."

Maji let out what sounded like a pitiful laugh – but Simba was too in love to pick up on that. "Oh, Simba, you're very sweet," she said. "You make a very handsome, cute little boyfriend. I almost feel sorry for what I'm going to do soon. But still, at least I've let you live much longer than the others. That's because you're very special. Very special indeed. It's worth the wait, in my opinion."

Simba didn't register the underlying threat in what Maji was saying to him. Every time she opened her mouth to speak, all he heard were the most beautiful, heartfelt, romantic words coming out of her mouth. He loved her, and she loved him. That was all that really mattered. They were going to be together for ever.

"Simba, come with me." Maji pulled Simba to his paws, before leading him across the endless desert they were in. "You see this place?" She gestured to all the sand. "It's not exactly my most favourite location. Too hot for me. *Far* too hot. But it's the only place I can stay, so I have to make do with it. On the bright side, it does make such an *excellent* place for hiding the bodies."

A thin, evil smile spread across her face, as she stared at Simba. He just stared straight ahead, a smile on his face.

She was his little slave. She had him completely under her control. No matter what she asked him to do, he would do it. Simba was so lost in the wonderful, weird world of love that he didn't care. He would obey her every command.

"I'm going to show you something, Simba," Maji told him. "But I don't think you're going to like it. Well, the *real* you wouldn't – but while under my control, I'm sure you'll be fine."

"Come on." Nala nudged Haiba on his side, before walking across the sand. "There's gotta be something around here *somewhere*. It can't all just be a big desert."

"That's what it looks like from here," Haiba replied.

"Don't be negative – we need to keep our spirits up, if we stand a chance of finding Simba and figuring out who's behind this."

"So *this* is some big evil guy trying to kill us, then? *Again*." Haiba sighed. "Who is it this time? The Emerald Elf?"

"I was thinking Sandy," Nala retorted with a smile. "Fits the location. After all, isn't a cheesy name what makes a villain in the first place? It's always 'Shocker' this and 'Royal Reaper' that. Me and Simba used to have a game where we were superheroes. He was Super Simba, and I was Nasty Nala."

Haiba couldn't help but laugh. "Not as carefree as when I was born," he said. "When I was just three days old I had to learn how to wrestle a snake, otherwise I would have been fed to the wild Kubwa beasts."

"What's a wild Kubwa beast?" Nala asked.

"You don't want to know," was his reply. He looked ahead. "Well, there doesn't seem to be anything in sight, so I think we should try to swim back. Let's go."

He turned around to leave, but Nala grabbed him. "You can't just go, Haiba," she told him. "We have to figure this out – before it's too late."

"Then you'd better start thinking," Haiba said. "'Cause from the looks of the sun..." He looked upwards. "We've got about three hours before we burn to death."

"*What?*"

Maji dragged Simba along, until they came to a significantly darker patch of sand than the rest of the eternal desert they stood in. "Here we are, Simba," she announced, leaning towards her little slave with a smile. "This is where I keep my most prized possessions."

"Really?" Simba sounded like he was someplace far away. "Wow..."

"And it's very special to me," Maji continued to explain, "because it has a sentimental value. Every time I come here, I remember all of the good times I shared with my victims – *friends* – who came here." She grinned at Simba. "Would you like to see?"

All she got in response was a silly laugh.

"I thought so."

"*Three hours?*" Nala exclaimed, her teal eyes wide with horror. Part of her believed Haiba, and part of her didn't. Was he joking? Was this just some kind of sick prank he was playing on her? Did he actually think this was *funny*? "Haiba, please say that this is a joke."

"I'm serious," Haiba said, proving Nala's fears to be true. "I can tell by looking at the sun. We're out in the open, on the hottest part of the day, on the hottest day in the year – with no protection. We've got three hours – *maximum*."

"*Maximum?*" Nala was trying very hard not to panic. "Oh, this is bad. This is bad. This is very, very, *very* bad." She looked around frantically, trying to figure out what to do. "Please tell me what you're thinking, Haiba."

"I'm thinking about your mother," Haiba replied. "She's kind of cute when you get up close to her."

Nala grabbed Haiba, an urgent look in her eyes. "Haiba, you can try and date my mother later. But this is important right now!"

"All right, all right, I'm thinking, I'm thinking," he said. Haiba looked upwards, and then he looked down. "Hey, wait a minute. I've noticed something."

"Noticed what?" Nala asked, a smile forming on her face. This was good, wasn't it? Maybe they were on their way to finally figuring something out! "Haiba, what is it?"

"This patch of sand is darker than the rest," he said.

Nala's face fell. "*What?*" She hit him on the side angrily. "You're completely useless when our lives are at stake, did you know that?"

"Don't doubt me," he said. "I know what I'm doing. Something's not right."

"Oh, so the sand is a little darker in some place," Nala said, throwing her forepaws up in the air. "Big deal. What's it got to do with anything?"

"It implies..." Haiba sat down, staring at the darkened patch of sand. "That someone has dug this particular part of sand up," he explained. "It means that someone has been here – perhaps the someone who put us underwater and most likely kidnapped Simba."

Nala looked very doubtful. "I don't think so," she said, shaking her head as she sat beside Haiba. "Haiba, why would someone dig up the sand? It's pointless. It doesn't mean anything. You're just being ridiculous. Look..." Nala began to dig up some of the sand. "There's nothing under—"

Nala let out a terrified scream at what she saw.

AN: Quite a scary cliffhanger, eh? But I'm always doing that, so it's not like your surprised, is it? You can *act* surprised if you want, though. So, what did Nala find under the sand? What does Maji want from Simba? Can you intelligent readers figure it out before tomorrow? I'm sure *one* of you can. Do it and win yourself an imaginary cake.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Water Always Wins

AN: Time to reveal all of the secrets and mysteries in this story that you've all been waiting for? Who do they? What? And why? This make no sense, no? It's real good, ha?

Looneyman1933: Oh, you're very, very close with that guess. So close that you just might be right.

LionKingFactsGuy2: Sarafina belongs to no one. She's the most independent lioness around. Plus, she's also a little bit crazy. And yes, Maji is a cool villain. But will she survive?

Chapter Seven: Water Always Wins

"Oh, my gosh!" Nala cried, falling onto her back in alarm. "What the heck is that?" she asked, pointing at what she had found underneath the sand.

She couldn't believe it. It was like nothing she had ever seen before. To say that it was disgusting was the understatement of the century. She felt like she was about to be sick. Her stomach churned at the sight.

Haiba looked rather disgusted. "It's a body," he finally answered. "Although it's not like any one I've ever seen."

Nala and Haiba stared down at the body buried in the sand. It wasn't a skeleton – what would normally qualify for a dead body – because it had all of its skin. It appeared to be a lion. The skin had become tight and rigid, clinging to the bones of the body. Its eyes were sunk deep back into its sockets. Its mouth was wide open, as if this lion had seen the most terrifying thing imaginable.

"What happened to it?" Nala asked, taking another step backwards. It was a stupid idea, but she thought that this thing was going to reach up and strangle her. Her imagination liked to run wild sometimes. "It looks like it's been sucked together."

"More like *drained*," said Haiba. "Considering the skin is still attached to the body and hasn't worn out, I'd say that this ... lion – I think it's a lion – has been completely drained of all liquid. Or, to be more exact, *water*."

"Water?" Nala raised her eyebrows. "I'm starting to see a connection here. So this guy – if it *is* a guy – has been completely drained of water?"

Haiba nodded. "Yep. Drained dry. Every last drop. Like squeezing the juice out of an orange."

Nala grimaced, disgusted at the thought. "That's horrible," she said. "Who could do such a thing?"

"Either someone with severe thirst, or some kind of weird sea creature that we've never seen before," Haiba replied. "I'd pick the latter."

"Sea creature?" Nala looked doubtful. "In the middle of the desert? Haiba, you're talking crazy. Maybe a snake just strangled him or something."

"Snakes don't attack like this," Haiba told her. "Besides, since when does a snake drain water from bodies? It doesn't add up. The only creature I know of that drains water from someone's body is a mermaid."

Nala raised an eyebrow, remaining unconvinced. She'd heard stories about mermaids before. Her mother had quite an imagination – something she had most likely passed down to her daughter – and had delighted in telling her cub stories about mermaids and all kinds of creatures that lived beneath the water.

But none of that was true. It was just a story.

Wasn't it?

"Mermaids aren't real, Haiba," Nala said. "That's just something you only hear in fairy tales."

Haiba raised his eyebrows at her. "Really, you think? Mermaids are very real, Nala. Deep under the sea. So deep that you'll never ever find one – unless one of them decides to come up to the surface."

"But they're nice," Nala argued. "*Aren't they?*" she said, suddenly beginning to doubt even herself. She put a paw to her forehead. *This headache's getting worse...*

"Oh, yeah," Haiba replied. "Most of them are nice. Get lucky and one just might give you a kiss. But then you don't want to meet the nasty ones. Those are mean. *Real* mean. They're weak, and pathetic, and useless. They can only survive on water. That is, water from someone's body. It's pure. Full of nutrients and energy and... Well, a lot of other stuff. It gives them power."

"So a mermaid has decided to bring us all the way out to the middle of a desert to drain all the water from our bodies?" Nala said. "Haiba, that just sounds—"

"I'm not finished yet," Haiba interrupted. "You see, these mermaids – while very worthless – are extremely beautiful. Like the most beautiful creatures in the world. So beautiful that it has this... hypnotic effect on you. One look at one of the mermaids and you'll fall for it – instantly."

Nala narrowed her eyes. "So what you're saying is... that if I took a look at a mermaid, then—"

"—You'd be all over her in a second," Haiba finished with a smile. "What confuses me is why a mermaid is living out in the middle of a desert."

"That's what I said. That's why it doesn't make sense," Nala told him. "A mermaid – if it's even real – wouldn't come out to the desert. They'd... fry up and die, or something like that. Think about it, Haiba."

"Must have been expelled from her colony," Haiba mused. He saw the look Nala was giving him, and then decided to explain. "Mermaids live in colonies. Entire kingdoms, actually. And normally the mean ones don't do so well there. So, this one must have been thrown out – meaning she's banned from being in the water."

"So how did we end up in the water?" Nala asked.

"Uncharted water," Haiba responded. "It's not governed by the mer-people. I could tell by looking at the waves. Different pattern."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Nala said, her eyes wide. She couldn't understand any of this. "Haiba, my brain is actually hurting. I think I can feel it *melting*. I have got such a headache..."

Haiba nodded, running a paw through the fur on top of his head. "Yeah," he agreed. "Must be the heat. It's getting to us both. We've got about half an hour left."

"*Excuse me?*" Nala yelled, her eyes nearly popping out this time. "You said five minutes ago we had three hours!"

"Yeah – when the heat was at that temperature," Haiba replied. "Didn't you hear what Simba was saying earlier? It was getting hotter. The mermaid must be draining all the water from everywhere. Probably the water hole, too. With no cool, everything's just getting hotter. In just five minutes it's become about three times hotter. In about half an hour, we really *will* be puddles of goo."

"Look at this," Maji said, reaching into the sand, and wrenching something from it.

She pulled out what appeared to be the foreleg of a lion. A bone stuck out of one end, with dried blood surrounding it.

"He was pretty young," she said. "Still not enough water. It's the cubs that I need, Simba. They're the ones with all the energy. The power that I need to stay alive. One day without water and I wither, and I die. But with you..."

She smiled, pinching Simba's cheeks. "I might be able to live for three – maybe even *four* days without any water! I'm so lucky to have found you. You're such a fine..." Her eyes glowed blue. "Specimen."

Simba stared straight ahead, having lost the power of speech. He was so in love with Maji that he couldn't do anything at all. He could just barely register her commands. He was just a shell of his former self.

Maji grinned evilly.

It was time.

"What are we going to do?" Nala fretted, fanning herself with a paw. But it didn't help at all. The temperature just seemed to be getting hotter and hotter. She couldn't even bear to *think* about the sun, let alone *look* at it. "This is hopeless. We're going to burn. Burn, burn, burn for ever."

Nala collapsed into the sand, but soon jumped back to her paws when she saw that she was lying right in front of the dead corpse. "Yikes!" she cried, running behind Haiba. "You've got to think of something! And fast!"

"I know. I'll try."

Haiba closed his eyes, and sighed deeply, looking totally relaxed. Nala stared at him. "What are you doing?" she asked, confused.

"Trying to get into my happy place," he replied, opening one eye. He then took a deep breath, and slowly exhaled. "It's a Grand Lands trick. Getting into your happy place allows you to think better. I'm sure I'll come up with something within the next five minutes."

"Five minutes?" Nala yelled. "We could be *dead* by then! You've gotta think faster, Haiba! You're the weird one! I can't think because I'm going to *fry*!"

"All right, all right!" Haiba opened his eyes, and walked over to the dead body that was partially buried underneath the sand. "This may look completely disgusting, but bear with me for a moment."

Haiba frowned, stuck his tongue out, and then gave the body's chest a long lick, tasting it thoughtfully.

Nala retched, looking away from Haiba and down at the sand. Her stomach lurched, and she felt like she was going to throw up.

Haiba returned his tongue to his mouth, and smiled. "Hmm. This body tastes funny. That's odd."

"Well, he *is* dead!" Nala said, staring at Haiba with wide eyes. "Why the heck did you even do that? How's it going to help? What's next, are you going to *eat* him?"

"No," said Haiba. "I tasted him to find out where he'd been killed," he explained. "We need to keep going forward, and then hopefully we'll find where this mermaid kills her victims. Come on." He looked up at the sun. "We have to kill her within the next five minutes, or we're dead."

With every step she took, Nala found herself feeling weaker and weaker. The intense rays from the sun were searing her body. She didn't know how much more she could take. She began to feel drowsy, and wanted to just collapse in the sun there and then.

But she knew she had to keep going.

Lifting her head up, Nala smiled at what she saw just in front of her.

"Simba!"

Nala was surprised to find Simba standing right in front of her, but she didn't care. At last, she had found him!

Nala grabbed for Simba with her paws, ready to give him a big hug.

She then frowned when her paws went right through him, as if he were a ghost. Nala frowned as Simba faded away into nothingness, leaving only the yellow, yellow sand.

"What?" Nala didn't understand.

"Mirage," Haiba said, watching her reaction. "That happens a lot in the desert. You think you're seeing something good, but then it's not really there. Right now I see a babbling brook with loads of pretty lionesses around it. But I know it's not real."

"I wish it was," Nala mumbled. "Simba being there, I mean; not the pretty lionesses."

"I'm very, very sorry, Simba – but I'm afraid your time is up. I have to feast. I have to invade that beautiful body, and suck every last drop of water from it. All that energy. All that fire – and that's not a word I use very often. I so detest heat." Maji stroked Simba's cheeks. "Plenty of colour in that face of yours, Simba," she told him. "That means more for me."

Simba simply smiled, not a care in the world. His whole mind had shut down because of Maji's irresistible beauty. All that kept going through his mind was how wonderful she was. It was impossible for him to think of anything else. Totally and utterly impossible.

She was going to drain all of the water from his body, and he didn't even care. She could do whatever she wanted with him. She could *eat* him whole, and he wouldn't mind one little bit. He would do anything for her...

Maji laughed, pushing Simba to the ground, so he lay on his back, staring up at the sky, still smiling. She licked her muzzle, her heart beating with excitement at what she was about to do.

Every time she drained all of the water from her victim's bodies, it gave her such a rush. A mad, wild rush that gave her the greatest sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Murdering was all she knew. It was all she *could* do. She needed at least one victim to get her through the day. It was necessary to ensure her survival. She hated the wretched life that she had been cursed with – but she could do nothing about it.

Maji leaned towards Simba, a maniacal grin on her face. She opened her mouth and let out a monstrous retch, as a long, forked tongue flicked out. "Here we go again," she said for what felt like the thousandth time, before lunging towards Simba.

She kissed him passionately, shoving her long tongue inside his mouth. Her breathing became heavy with anticipation, as she knew that her tongue – what she used to drain her victims of their water – was now working its way down Simba's body.

Simba's eyes grew wide, and he tried to let out a gasp – but he couldn't breathe. He quickly snapped out of the hypnotic trance that Maji's beauty had caused him to go into, and became horrified as something long violently forced its way down his throat and into the lower areas of his body.

Something was sucking something from him. Draining him. His eyes lids grew very heavy, and he felt like he was going to pass out. His head was ready to explode. He'd never ever felt anything like this before.

Maji smiled as her long tongue invaded Simba's body, and began to lap up all of the water, sucking his body dry. It would only take about a minute. Having done this for so long, she had become an expert at it.

Simba felt weaker and weaker, as the whole world around him began to blur again. His eyelids flickered, and he fought to stay awake.

But whatever had invaded his body was far too strong. It continued to suck something from his body. He didn't know what. He couldn't sum up the strength to even think. Everything was so confusing...

Maji continued to suck the water from Simba, knowing that no one would be able to stop her now. Before long, Simba would become a dead husk, soon to be buried under the sand for ever and ever.

And then the whole thing would start all over again.

"Oof!"

Maji was shocked when she found herself pushed to the ground by something – or someone – else.

She looked up to find an angry cub staring down at her, her eyes blazing furiously. "Okay, Little Miss Mermaid, let me get one thing straight: *no one* kisses my future king and gets away with it!"

Maji growled, and shoved the cub hard in the chest, sending her flying into the air and crashing down into the sand. "Ow!"

Nala picked herself up, ready to face Maji again. She wasn't going to let her kill Simba like she had killed everyone else. This ended now. "Haiba, help me out here." She looked behind. "Haiba?"

Haiba was staring at Maji, his eyes wide. "She's so beautiful..."

"Oh, come on!" Nala exclaimed, rolling her eyes. "So much for your help!" He then looked at Maji, who seemed ready to tear her throat out. "Now, if I were a mermaid, how would I be killed?"

Maji roared, grabbing Nala by the throat. "You're a very interesting little *girl*, aren't you?" she said. "There are not many people who can resist my beauty. Even the females. That spices things up a little when I have to drain them too to survive." She narrowed her eyes at Nala. "What makes you so special?"

"Easy," Nala responded. "I'm very angry. You see that cub over there?" She gestured to Simba. "He's my boyfriend, and I don't exactly like the idea of you having your dirty paws all over him."

Maji rolled her eyes. "Shut up," she said, before throwing Nala back down into the sand. "I'm not going to let a little brat

like you ruin my feast."

She headed towards Simba, ready to finish things quickly. Unfortunately, savouring Simba wasn't an option now. She had to finish this before she died of dehydration. Mermaids like her didn't last very long out in the sun.

Nala growled, jumping at Maji and wrestling her to the ground. "You're not doing *anything*!" she yelled. "This ends now!"

Maji smiled. "Oh, you're quite right about that." She then slashed Nala hard in the face with her claws, before throwing her aside.

Nala let out a cry of pain, putting a paw to her face. She was horrified to see blood – and quite a lot of it. "Oh, you're gonna get it now."

Maji reached out for Simba's body, only for Nala to jump out right in front of her. "Get out of my way!"

"I don't think so."

Maji couldn't take any more of this. She was going to tear this cub's head off. She was dead meat.

Extending her claws, Maji tried to slash Nala in the throat.

But before she could do anything, she gasped in pain, falling to her back. "No!" she cried, putting a paw to her chest. "No! It's... it's..."

Nala watched with confusion as Maji clutched her chest, gasping and gurgling in pain. "I'm..." Her eyes widened in horror. "I'm too late."

Maji looked up at the sun, feeling its powerful heat burn her. Everything was burning. It hurt to speak, it hurt to think, and it hurt to *live*.

She was too late. She had failed to drain the water from Simba's body, and now she was paying the price for it.

Maji opened her mouth wide, and let out a deafening screech. Nala covered her ears, wincing at how loud she was.

Water exploded from Maji's mouth, as she continued to screech at the top of her powerful lungs. Gallons and gallons of water shot out, as her body began to shrink in size and shape. She was becoming smaller, and smaller, and smaller...

The screeching abruptly stopped, as Maji disappeared from sight.

She was gone.

Nala felt a little confused, but that didn't deter the sense of accomplishment she had. "Good work, Nala," she told herself, a smile on her face.

"I carried him," Haiba said, once he, Simba and Nala were back, safe and sound, in the den at Pride Rock. "I *carried* him."

"Stop complaining," Nala said.

"Six hours!" Haiba cried. "Six hours! And that was just the swimming! Altogether, it took us twelve hours to get back home!"

"What's your problem?" Nala asked.

"He woke up after the first!"

Simba sat up, a woozy look on his face. He looked absolutely exhausted. "Can you stop shouting, please?" he asked. "It's hurting my brain."

"Well, you were almost sucked dry by a mermaid," said Haiba. "You should consider yourself lucky that she didn't get to finish the job."

"What happened to her, anyway?" Nala wondered. "It was really weird. She just kind of shrank and shrank until she was... nothing."

"She ran out of time," Haiba explained. "Mermaids can only go a certain amount of time without water. And it looks like that time came around. So, she just shrank up and died."

"Oh." Nala shrugged. "Well, that's good, I guess."

"And the water came back into the water hole," Simba added. "That's good, too."

"And it got colder," Nala added. "Looks like the mermaid dying reversed everything."

"It seems so." Haiba smiled. "There we go. No more trouble for the rest of today. We can relax, safe and sound."

"*Simba!*" Mufasa's voice rang through the den. "*You're in very big trouble!*"

The End

AN: Oh, well. Maji died. Goodbye to a good villain. There's still better ones to come, though. At least, that's what I think. Who's your favourite villain? Hey, that could be the next poll!

Anyway, it seems that I've ended things on yet another cliffhanger. Simba's parents yelling can only mean that they're not happy, which will inevitably end up with him getting into trouble. I wonder how this will play out. Find out next time!

NEXT TIME: Simba is sent away to a camp for misguided cubs. Can Nala and Haiba break him out?